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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for using puppets in the classroom are the focus of this how-to-do-it piece by a participant in a Title I elementary school project. Although originally designed as a language arts unit on reading and vocabulary development, the activities described could be adapted for other teaching objectives. Seven aspects of the puppetry project are briefly outlined, including advice on organizing your time, selecting the puppets, preparing the script, and constructing the stage. More detailed information about the learning activities is given along with a bibliography on puppets. (LLS)

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The 7 T's of Using Puppets in the Classroom

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Should you even try it?

I. TIME

The first question to ask is - how much time is available for this project? Do you have time to organize, cojole, create, and generally mastermind a project. A project director is needed who can keep everyone involved on their toes, and who is not shy about enforcing deadlines. All your goodhearted collegues will volunteer to help, but may find other commitments filling their day. Sometimes you have to force them into living up to their promises. (Don't tighten the vice to tight or they'll just quit. The art of friendly coercion must be practiced). Estimate how long you think the project will <u>really</u> take and them increase the time by half. Unexpected things ALWAYS happen. (Punch and Judy's corrolary to Murphy's Law?) We had four different departments working on our project. That also increased the time needed for completion.

II. TYPE

I have used many types of puppets successfully in the classroom. Some you may wish to consider are: sock, paper-bag, stick or rod, shadow, fingers, string (<u>simple</u> marionettes) and paper-mache. There are many excellent books on how to make all of these puppets (bibliography appended). Each method involves a different amount of materials and time.

III. TALE

There are also many methods of obtaining scripts. If you have the time the best method is to let the students write their own. Each can assume a character and play that role. Tape record their role-play and have a secretary transcribe the tape.

Meet with the students to edit and polish the text, producing a finial script. If you do not have time to create a script, commercial ones are available or choose a favorite book to adapt.

IV. TALENT

Investigate resources available in your organization. Decide whether the process or the product is what is important to you. Your decision will determine if you want the students to do everything (double your time estimate), or, if having them view a play produced by the staff meets your need. Since reading and vocabulary development, rather than art or physical skills, were our intent, the students viewed a play produced entirely by staff. Parents also helped by producing our props and working with the children on the cultural implications of the unit.

V. THEATRICS

You must also decide if a stage, scenery, props, or special lighting is desired. Especially if you make a video recording, as we did, lighting will be necessary. A stage can be formed by placing a table with a long cloth in front of a doorway. The puppeteers crouch behind the table. A window can be used in the same manner. Imagination provides the scenery. Or, using a table as a base, a window can be cut in a cardboard screen which is then placed on the table. Easier yet is using a large box (the kind refrigerators are shipped in) with a stage window cut in it. Scenery can be attached to a rod placed across the top of the box. It should extend beyond the edges of the box 4 or 5 inches so it doesn't fall through. I usually attach weights (washers, metal rings, etc.) to the bottom of each scene to make it hang straight. Cut out the top of the box and your classroom florescents will provide enough

light from above. Or, turn them off and have two students "spotlight" the action with flashlights.

Props are one of the biggest hazards in producing a puppet show. Cut out as many as possible! During the 12 minute "Goat in the Rug" production we used about 35. Do yourself a favor - don't try it! Several of our rehersals were spent dropping props until we worked out how to handle them. Another problem we encountered was size. PTRR made a beautiful loom for us based on the size of the puppet we gave them. She and it were well proportioned, the only problem was, the loom was 1" taller than the stage opening. Beware of prop problems!

VI. TAPES/MIKE

If at all possible use live sound. A little practice will be needed backstage to avoid feedback and for the actors to learn the right angle and volume, but it's worth the effort. Tapes are very stilted and don't allow for spontaneous reaction to audience comments or actions - they just keep rolling along. Really funny ad-libs can be lost. Also, tapes don't hold for laughs or applause as live performers can.

VII. TEACHING

TEACHING UNIT OUTLINE

OBJECTIVES:

Skill Building:
- learn word recognition - sight, decoding, context
- build vocabulary
- learn to follow directions
- learn to organize thoughts
- pick out main ideas
- make decisions

CULTURAL:
- improve self-concept
- learn survival skills
- learn ethnic culture
- learn to be considerate
- learn to adapt
- become aware of man's harmony with nature

ACTIVITIES:

1. Make goat and sheep figures from fingerprints
2. Lecture on culture by resource person
3. Overheads (related book)
4. Vocabulary games
5. Poster projects: Match paragraphs to correct pictures
   Color in figures
6. Create a mural and act out a story (related book)
7. Fill-in the blanks writing exercise
8. Drawing exercise: "I am a rug"
9. Sequencing exercise
10. Stuffed newspapers sculpture (following directions)
11. Read story out loud
12. Puppet play/video tape

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This same unit could be used to achive completely different skills/objectives. For instance, by approaching the same activities from a physical therapists' viewpoint, motor skills could be taught. In such a case, making the puppets might become a student activity, since the reading and listening skills would not be the main emphasis.

Our project involved five departments: Librarian - write script, direct, create puppet, Art Teacher - puppeteer, props, Media Center - scenery, stage video, Parent Teacher Resource Room - props, culture lectures, Title I Elementary - reading exercises, games, teaching unit. It's a good project to develop team teaching or interdepartmental cooperation.

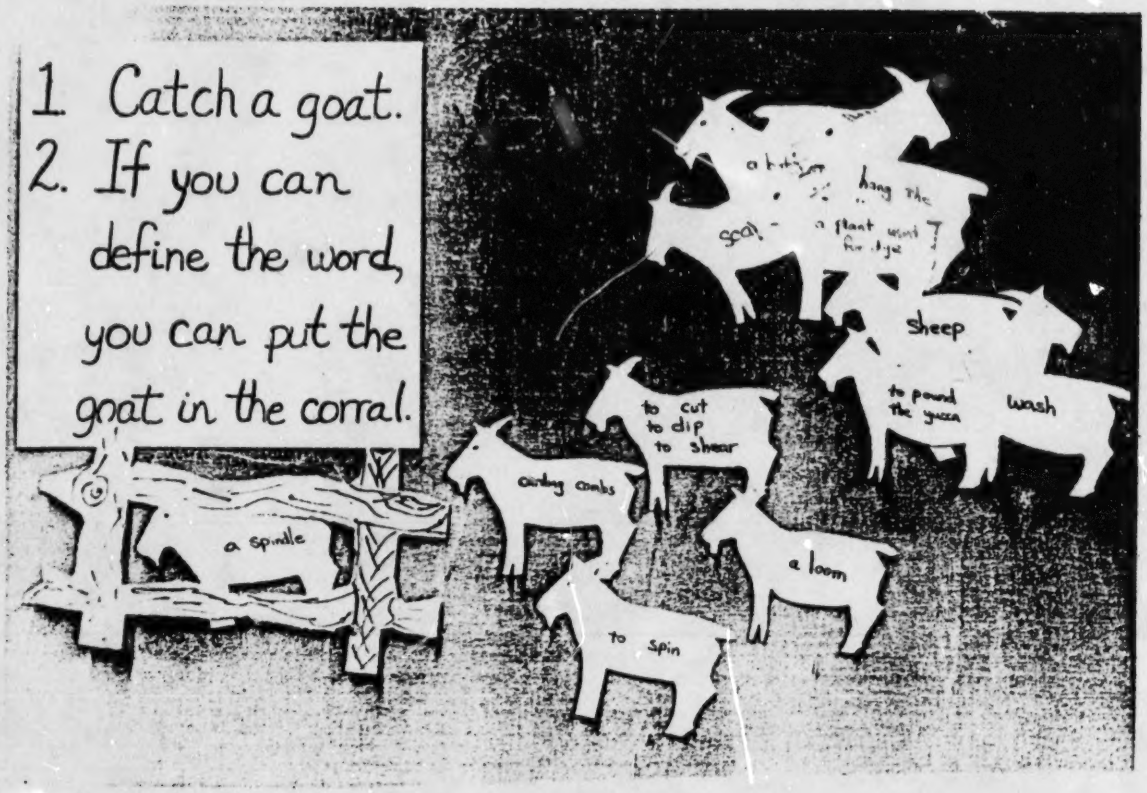
OUR TIMETABLE WENT AS FOLLOWS:

Five weeks prior to unit: choose book, begin script.
Four weeks prior to unit: order props, scenery, hand out script.
Two weeks prior to unit: begin rehersals.
After classroom production begin video project.
Do a practice tape and critique it for movement problems, lighting, dramatic flow, speech clarity. Beware! Video is unforgiving. An error that was funny live in the classroom will look stupid on tape. When you feel you are ready begin the actual taping, allow time for several. It took us four tries and we're "experienced".

The learning acitivites used in conjuction with the "Goat in the Rug" puppet play were developed by Sandy Mann, Title I Elementary Director. Following is a description of the activities listed on the Teaching Outline:

1. Fingerpaint or tempra can be used. The children make finger prints on art paper. After they dry, legs, tails, heads are added to make the animals.
2. Lectures on weaving, sheep herding, natural dyes.
3. Two related books were put on transpariencies for group reading and discussion sessions. The vocabulary from "Goat in the Rug" was also in these books.
4. Vocabulary game - Round up the goats. Cut out goat figures and put one word on each. A child picks a goat from the pile, and if she can translate or define the word the goat is placed in the corral. The whole class was one team, helping each other. We do not have competing teams here as that would be contrary to cultural values.
5. Large drawings of each page of the book were made using an opaque projector. The text from each page was put on seperate cards. The students had to match the paragraph to the correct pictures, demonstrating concept learning as well as reading ability. They then colored the pictures, choosing proper tints and remaining within the lines (a motor skill).
6. Another story, The Mountain Shepard, became a pantomime exercise. Scenery elements, such as "sheep fold" or"mountian", were taken from the story and written on cards. Each child picked a card and drew the piece of scenery. The parts were put together in a mural. Stick puppets of the characters in the story were made. The story was read aloud and acted out. This story has a re-fraim which everyone ended up chanting as

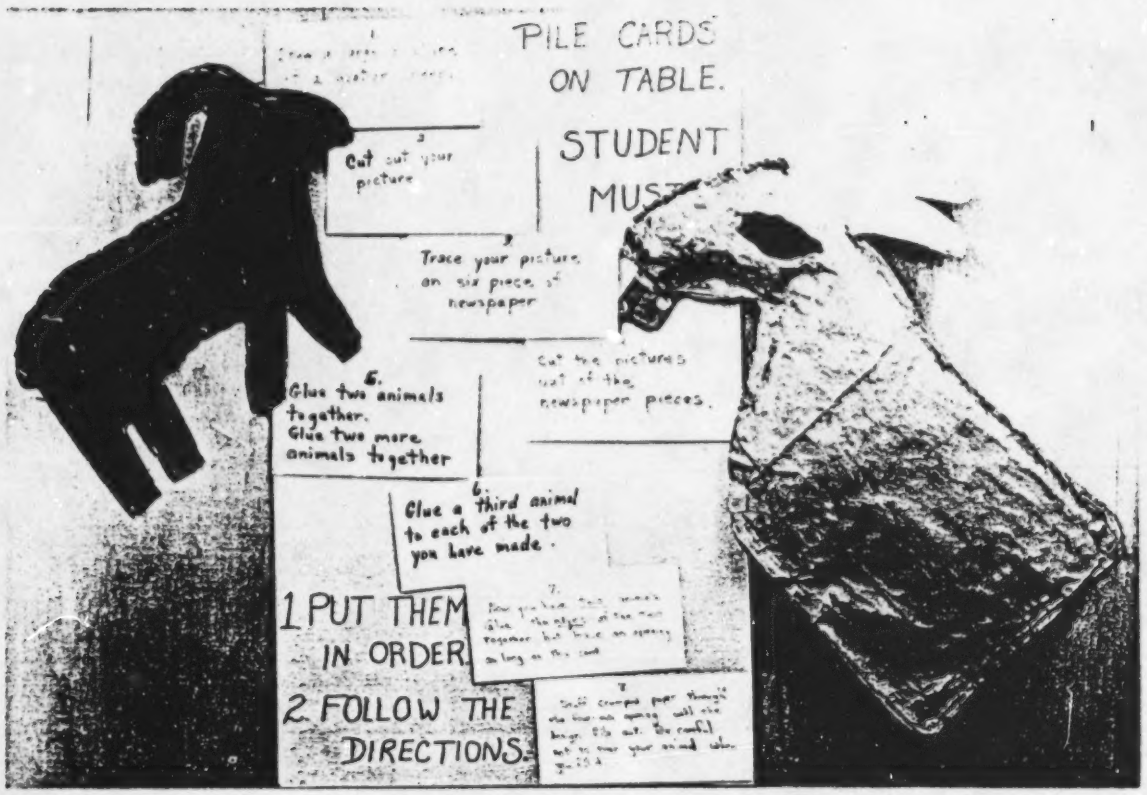
Activity # 4:


1. Catch a goat.
2. If you can define the word, you can put the goat in the corral.
a spindle
carding combs
to spin
to cut
to dip
to shear
sheep
to pound the grain
wash
a loom

a chorus each time it appeared. Sandy said this was the most successful exercise in the entire unit.

7. A vocabulary exercise "I am a Rug" was a paragraph with blanks the students had to fill in. For younger children, the words can be listed at the bottom and they can choose the correct one for each space.
8. The children were asked to "weave yourself into a rug". Based on what they had learned, they drew and painted rug patterns.
9. After learning the vocabulary and the concepts, the students were asked to sequence the posters, recreating the story in the book.
10. Another task involved sequencing as well as following directions. Instructions for making stuffed newspaper goats and sheep were placed on 3 x 5 numbered cards. The students had to put the directions in order and them follow them.
11. The finial exercise preceeding the puppet show was for each child to be able to read out loud each poster.
12. The show: The puppet show was the finial acitivity in the unit, both a reward and a summation. We video-taped it in the classroom including shots of the audience. This tape was for immediate playback and rienforcement for the students. It was not retained. The permanent tape was made the following week in the studio with proper lighting, sound, and technical procedures. The purpose of making the permanent tape was to have the ability to recreate the performance for follow-up exercises and to use with the unit when puppeteers are not available.

Activity # 10:


PILE CARDS ON TABLE.
STUDENT MUST
Cut out your picture
Trace your picture on six piece of newspaper
Cut the pictures out of the newspaper pieces.
Glue two animals together. Glue two more animals together
Glue a third animal to each of the two you have made.
1 PUT THEM IN ORDER.
2 FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS.

This unit involved eight persons' time over a period of a month and a half but we all felt it was well worth the effort. This unit will become a permanent part of the Title I curriculum and will require minium preperation in the future. It was also a good learning experience for the teachers involved and can promote cooperative teaching efforts among several departments, which in itself, may be justification enough for the project. Good Luck

Any Questions: Tish Cavaleri
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1980

Photos by Yin May Lee.

Most Public Libraries have lots of books on puppets - check the YA and Children's collections too. These were in our local library:

Batchelder, Marjorie. Puppets and plays, a creative approach. Harper, 1956. An old but good volume with emphasis on the production of a puppet play rather than on puppet construction.

Batchelder, Marjorie. Puppet theatre handbook. Harper, 1947. An earlier version of the above which is very detailed.

Currell, David. Complete book of puppetry. Plays, Inc., 1974. Includes detailed instructions for specific types of puppet construction.

Dean, Audrey. Puppets that are different. Taplinger, 1974. Delightful collection of off-beat puppets.

Mulholland, John. Practical puppetry. Arco Pub.Co., 1961. Gives an overview of puppetry. Has good stage construction plans.

Snook, Barbara. Puppets. Branford Co., 1965. Includes good hand puppet patterns.

Wall, L.V., ed. The Complete puppet book. Crowell, n.d. Old but good. Is very detailed and has excellant illustrations. Articles contributed by members of the Educational Puppetry Association.